

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Attorney General Eric Holder delivered an important speech at the American Bar Association's annual meeting in San Francisco. He spoke about the issue of overcrowding in federal prisons and the policies that have led to this problem. He said that, "too many Americans go to too many prisons for far too long and for no good law enforcement reason." He also stated that, "widespread incarceration at the federal, state, and local levels is both ineffective and unsustainable." He announced that federal prosecutors will take steps to prevent the application of mandatory minimum sentences to certain low-level drug offenders. Since 1970, the number of individuals incarcerated in the U.S. has risen from approximately 300,000 to over 2 million. This makes the United States the world's leading incarcerator by far with an average incarceration rate of over 700 per 100,000. Mass incarceration has consigned 1.3 million African Americans and Hispanics to prison. According to the latest available figures, these two groups comprise 58 percent of all inmates even though they make up only one quarter of the U.S. population.

Following Attorney General Holder's comments, John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.), Ranking Member of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, and Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-Va.), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations issued the following statement:

Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.): "I welcome Attorney General Holder's recognition of the problem of massive over-incarceration, a situation that is unjust and fiscally unsustainable, both at the federal level and in the states. In fact, some states, such as Texas and Arkansas are already taking action to find alternatives to incarcerating some offenders. I applaud the steps the Attorney General will take to reduce the application of mandatory minimum sentences to certain low-level drug offenders and I hope he will join in the larger effort to eliminate mandatory minimum sentencing across the board, including H.R. 1695, the 'Justice Safety Valve Act,' introduced by Rep. Bobby Scott and which I am cosponsoring."

Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-Va.): "The Attorney General is taking an important step toward rational and sound sentencing policy, but we must do more to curtail the application of mandatory minimum sentences. Studies have shown that mandatory minimum sentencing, which handcuffs the ability of judges to apply sentences which fit the circumstances of each case, fails to reduce crime. That is why we need to enact H.R. 1695, the 'Justice Safety Valve Act,' a bipartisan bill I have introduced with Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY) and other colleagues including Rep. John Conyers, and which has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Rand Paul (R-KY) as S. 619. This bill would allow judges to sentence federal offenders below the mandatory minimum sentence to prevent an unjust sentence, consistent with sentencing criteria already specified in federal law. We continue our call to adopt evidence-based, smart approaches to reducing crime, such as the Youth Promise Act, which I have introduced in the House as H.R. 1318, instead of policies which sound tough but only feed what the Children's Defense Fund calls the 'Cradle to Prison Pipeline.' We hope that the Attorney General's leadership in making these remarks today will be a spark that generates a

broader discussion about how we can adopt cost-effective crime-fighting approaches that make us safer while also saving money."

For more details on incarceration statistics, the NAACP Criminal Justice Fact Sheet can be found online at: <http://www.naACP.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>

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